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# Deportation and Detention: ICE-y and Dangerous Conditions

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Among the campaign promises President Trump has tried to deliver on immigration policy — ranging from the ban on travelers from predominantly Muslim countries to the ever-distant reality of a border wall — was also the somewhat less-provocative proposal to deport more illegal immigrants.

In an interview conducted shortly after the 2016 general election, Trump claimed he would seek to deport 2 to 3 million undocumented immigrants. While an administration that sought to end DACA and increased ICE immigration arrests by 30 percent may project the image of actively deporting more undocumented immigrants, Trump's policies have led to more inaction than one might think.

Last year in April, the private-prison corporation GEO Group announced its plans to build a new \$110 million detention center in Conroe, Texas, as part of a 10-year contract with ICE. The facility, scheduled to be finished by late 2018, will be able to house 1,000 more illegal immigrants seeking asylum in the U.S.

This facility is one of many ICE is seeking to supplement President Trump's crackdown on illegal immigration. An October post on their contracting website stated they were looking to "identify multiple possible detention sites . . . in the greater Chicago, Detroit, St. Paul, and Salt Lake City areas." In response to the post, another private-prison corporation called CoreCivic considered building a detention facility in

It seems necessary for ICE to contract out to corporations like GEO Group and CoreCivic in order to compensate for the increase in immigration arrests. Yet, the mayor of Conroe doesn't think so. Mayor Toby Powell said, "We have plenty of rooms for our illegal aliens who are breaking the law," arguing the new facility is unnecessary when Conroe already has the Joe Corley Detention Facility.

On top of this criticism that awarding new contracts is unwarranted, GEO Group has been accused of committing multiple human rights violations in past years. A 2008 report claimed that those detained in a Washington State facility were being verbally and physically abused, as well as denied adequate healthcare. Undocumented activists in 2012 orchestrated their own arrests in order to investigate and document abuses within a GEO Group center in Florida, bringing attention to a detainee who, after having undergone emergency ovarian surgery, was promptly returned to her cell.

Representing one of the most severe cases of those victimized under the purview of GEO Group is Douglas Menjivar, an illegal immigrant from El Salvador detained in Joe Corley. He filed a civil rights complaint in 2017, stating he was raped in his cell by other inmates and ridiculed by the medical staff when he reported it.

Altogether, accusations that private detention centers treat detainees inhumanely are not as uncommon as one might hope. Protesting GEO Group's new detention center in Conroe, a small group of activists made sure to mention the corporation's questionable human rights record.

GEO Group has defended these accusations, stating the corporation has "a long history of providing culturally responsive services in safe and humane environments that meet the needs of individuals in the care and custody of federal immigration authorities." When then-Deputy AG Yates announced the Bureau of Prisons would be phasing out private contractors for regular prisons, claiming private facilities "compare poorly to our own Bureau facilities," an opinion piece in *The Washington Post* by Sasha Volokh responded that Yates was "exaggerating what empirical studies tell us about private vs. public prison comparisons."

Even if it's uncertain that many immigration detention centers would necessarily see less human rights violations if they were federally run, one thing is for certain — it's hard to get information on these facilities. According to TIME, in most states (aside from some notable exceptions), "private prisons are not covered by the same freedom of information and open records laws as are other government functions," preventing critical information on detention centers' living conditions from being scrutinized.

In addition to proposing a Private Prison Information Act to extend the reach of FOIA requests, lawmakers have called on ICE to update population data on detainees as regularly as the Bureau of Prisons does for regular inmates, so demographic statistics on detainees might be better publicized and facilities held more

accountable by the public. Additionally, Denise Gilman at the UT School of Law argues, “Audits are often conducted of these private immigration prisons by other private companies in the same correctional industry, so that they are not objective and robust,” in being held to irregular standards.

Even in simply trying to counsel their clients, immigration attorneys too are hindered. A letter to ICE in 2015 detailed accounts of lawyers being prevented from speaking to the detainees they represent, calling for increased oversight in private detention centers.

As ICE arrests more and more undocumented immigrants in order to deport, their immediate solution is to continue contracting out to private-prison corporations. Yet, “Despite a 43 percent increase in immigration arrests since Trump's inauguration, ICE actually deported fewer people in the 2017 fiscal year than in the previous year,” according to NPR. In Texas alone, there are over 100,000 immigration court cases waiting on the backlog.

Not only are there thousands of detainees across the U.S. waiting for their cases to be heard, but many have been simply lost in the bureaucratic nightmare ICE is further becoming (and, quite frankly, already was) with the expansion of the detention system.

For instance, Oscar Arnulfo Ramírez waited seven months before finding out his case was already closed — yet, he was still detained in a facility in Laredo. The immense amount of cases without a court date have created a “sense of hopelessness among the women,” detained in the T. Don Hutto Residential Center, “with some considering a return into hiding in their home countries,” according to *The Austin Chronicle*.

It seems as if President Trump's promise to deport more illegal immigrants is something quite different in reality, as arrests have increased drastically while deportations have not. As more arrests lead to the building of new detention centers contracted out to private-prison corporations, it's worth calling attention to their lack of transparency and abundance of accusations. Trump's crackdown on immigration has not resulted in quick and easy turnarounds, as deportation might be romanticized as, but instead has led to months of ceaseless waiting — in often dangerous and inhumane conditions.

*U.S.*

immigration, ice, daca, deportation





# America Needs to Care About the Dreamers

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